

# Acoustic Routes QUESTIONNAIRE

Feedback

What You Want!

# What you want: Findings from the Questionnaire

The subs renewal form in the August Balladeer included a questionnaire canvassing your views on a range of issues facing Acoustic Routes. Of the 86 forms sent out, 33 were returned with at least some of the questions answered. This isn't a bad turnout as such things go. Some themes emerged from the answers, and they probably represent a fair cross-section of the views of the membership. Thanks to all of you who took the time to fill in the questionnaire. The findings, summarised below, have already been be a useful guide for the committee.

## You like the Balladeer

The question 'Do you think the Balladeer is a useful and interesting document to receive?' received a resounding 'Yes'— with many adding comments such as 'I read it fully', 'Helpful to plan ahead' and 'Well done to those responsible'. One person's single response on the questionnaire was 'No comment to pass, except seems to me you are getting better all the time — really enjoy the mag!'

Only one respondent answered this question less positively ('Not really') and 2 qualified their approval ('Yes — but you need a proofreader' and 'Yes! With changes to format and content' (unspecified)).

However, there was less consensus on the question, 'Are you ok to only receive it via email and/or view it on the website?'

A narrow majority (15) had a definite preference for a printed, posted copy: because 'I wouldn't read it online', 'I like to read something I hold', 'I read it cover to cover — wouldn't if electronic', and other similar comments. One respondent made the point that 'some people don't have printers or regularly use computers'. Another asked, 'How would you stop non-members reading it online?' Several observed how long it takes to download a pdf, especially on dial-up.

Fourteen respondents gave a qualified 'Yes' to the question (the qualification usually being that they would nevertheless prefer it in hard copy). Just 4 were positively in favour of an electronic Balladeer ('Yes — save a heap of money').

In spite of a clear preference for paper, most respondents were reluctant to pay more to get it, but 10 (that's almost a third) would be willing to do so if necessary. Some said 'Depends on cost'. Others raised objections: 'What would your membership be for then?' 'Subs are high enough' 'I'm not very rich'. One was 'happy to pick up at Sunday club events — don't need to post'. Many skipped the question.

The 'Other comments about Balladeer' question elicited a few suggestions: 'Contemporise the front cover', 'more reviews', 'Put the acoustic events around town in a wall planner', 'It should come out earlier, last week of previous month', 'Less chat and more info please', 'List websites of upcoming artists'. A couple of people noted their agreement with Nik's comments about the Balladeer (in the August issue).

One rather wistful comment perhaps expressed a general feeling about the Balladeer: 'I'm not sure I'd want the printed one to disappear completely.'

Of the two longer responses, one suggested the Balladeer have a simpler and hopefully cheaper format for most of the year and 'then perhaps once a year we could have a flash issue with pictures summing up the previous year ... Meanwhile maybe we could make more use of the website to document events.'

The other long response also attempted to reconcile the Balladeer's value in terms of club heritage with the disproportionate pressure it puts on club resources. This respondent suggested that we produce a printed Balladeer only twice or maybe three times a year.

'I see a reasonably sturdy A5 stapled booklet that will function as a sort of handbook for the coming 6 months, with month-by-month listings plus photos and reviews of club activities from the past half year, along with general information about Acoustic Routes and promotion of the website ... The Balladeer would remain as a "tangible, real" ambassador for the club — something to browse through, to have on the kitchen counter, to pass on to friends. Toi Poneke is 'OK-ish' but we'd love a better home'.

On a scale of 1 to 5, most respondents (16) scored the present Toi Poneke venue at 3 ('Ok-ish'). Six scored it better than this at 2, and one gave it the top score of 1 ('Excellent'). Two thought it less than OK at 4, and one gave it the bottom score of 5 ('Poor').

People's ideas of an ideal venue vary considerably, but clearly for most of you Toi Poneke is not it. On the question of whether we should look for a new venue, well over half said yes. However, many of these qualified their response in some way. There is a wariness about moving unless we can find the ideal place: 'Only if it's a definite improvement, with secure tenure', 'Only if it is better and for AR use only'.

Some are resigned to not being able to find (or afford) a better place, and see some positives in Toi Poneke: the good acoustics, central location, accessibility by public transport, and 'at least it's clean'. Some mentioned the recent improvements: 'Like the new decor and YAY! for the stage.'

There are more negatives than positives, though — some quite strongly expressed. For example: 'It has no feng shui. It is a dead location. Abandon it!' And: 'Having to stack chairs (or sneak off and leave others to do it) really is a big turn-off and way too much like Playcentre.' 'A bit too like a meeting hall.' 'Can be very stark and brightly lit.' A couple mentioned the noise from upstairs and the rattling door.

What comes through very strongly, in both what's wrong with TP and what's wanted in a new venue, is the desire for *ambiance*. A few people attempted to define this: 'café-come-concert style with stage', 'café style environment', 'comfortable chairs', 'less light!', 'more of a club feel'. Many approved the recent décor changes, but few wanted anything more in that line— 'don't go overboard', 'any more décor might spoil the acoustics'.

Your other top priorities for any new venue were good parking and good acoustics. Easy (or no) set-up also got a couple of mentions.

Many endorsed the idea of selling beer and wine — 'help club revenue', 'must provide grog else not a truly social club'— or encouraging BYO. One disapproved: 'Alcohol might lead to more chatter during performances'.

For some, staying acoustic is important: 'Stay unplugged. No sound system please', 'Pity if we have to start amplifying', 'Definitely no sound system'. But a couple of you think the opposite: 'Get a PA', 'Sound system priority'.

On the question of whether all club events should be in the same venue, many agreed: 'It helps develop the culture', 'Confusing enough keeping up with dates', 'Yes, to give AR an identifiable base in Wellington'.

However, a majority saw room for some flexibility: 'Regular events in one venue, not necessarily the one-offs', 'Not necessarily — great idea to use Paramount', 'No, but continuity for the same events is important', 'Think so, but maybe singarounds could be hosted to save costs', 'Quite nice to have an identity but more important that the venue fit the performance', 'We could have public concerts at one venue... and informal events at some other place more like a "club room"'.

Other general comments on the venue issue included the need for a proper stage 'so performers can be seen and heard', and concern about hire costs.

### **You're reasonably happy with the music**

Perhaps strangely, 13 of the 33 respondents skipped the music questions altogether. Of the rest, most had no comment on or approved the committee's draft music plan: 'This seems a good mix', 'All looks great — happy with the balance'.

In response to the question 'What do you want to see more of?', 8 picked up the suggestion of workshops: 'to learn new skills', 'for new performers', 'on stage craft'. One respondent suggested we ask guest artists 'if they'd be willing to do a workshop say from 4—6 on Sunday.' Some of you want to see more jam sessions, more opportunities for new players to participate, and more member events including social events.

Genres of music that people felt we should be capturing were 'trad' material, Maori songs, 'Appalachian music that is not country or bluegrass', Canadian folk, younger 'modern' folk, other cultural groups, unaccompanied singing ('not just shanties'), 'some classical intertwined perhaps', and 'roots music'. But one respondent thought that "'folk" allows for most genres'.

The question about new ideas or things to scrap brought forth a variety of ideas and some practical suggestions (not all about music). These included having less confusing names for events, bringing back rostered kitchen duty to involve non-performers, having a song-writing competition, playing CDs of NZ artists before the start, having more jam sessions, having fewer jam sessions, and bringing back the chocolate fish.

### **We need to reach out for more appeal**

Only 12 responded to the question 'How can we improve our club's appeal?' and most of those suggested some form of marketing, such as ads on radio and in community newspapers, and short promo performances. Other ideas included 'Less cliquiness!', 'Link AR name to events', 'More encouragement for small groups', 'Make a point of welcoming new faces', 'Make it easier for beginners/ strugglers to get

informal coaching' and 'background music at events'.

One respondent noted that 'the door position is quite important — the person on door is first contact for people coming in... Have one person charged with greeting people and generally making them feel like they are part of a club.'

### **You prefer Sundays and a 7.30 start**

You can't please everyone, and we were never going to get unanimity on the question of which day(s) to hold club events and at what time. Thirteen voted for Sundays only and none for Fridays only; but 8 said they liked having a mix of Fridays and Sundays.

As for start time: 13 voted for 7.30, 6 for 8.00, and 2 wanted 7.30 in winter and 8 in summer. Those who favoured an earlier start usually wanted an earlier finish; several felt that with 'work tomorrow' Sunday events ought to finish by 10.

Answers to 'Are there too many events?' divided about half and half yes and no.

### **The committee is on the right track, mostly**

The consensus seems to be that the committee serves members well ('Overall you guys do a great job') and is pretty much on the right track with its goal setting exercise. A few respondents offered suggestions: 'Put the minutes on the website', 'Just increase membership — don't get hung up about attracting young people'. One warned, 'Don't put too much effort in to changing for change's sake,' while another observed that 'the committee already carries too heavy a load in terms of the donkey work at events'.

One respondent suggested that we should 'think about who we actually want to have perform at the club and then invite them... rather than always starting with the people who have asked us if they can perform. I find Mainly Acoustic quite inspiring from that point of view.'

Someone thought we should 'encourage young people into the club and then organise a handover'. And one hopeful soul thought 'a back massage would be good'.

### **Door charges are enough, members' benefits maybe not**

Everyone who answered the question 'Are you happy with the way we structure the door charges with discounts for members?' agreed that they were, but not everyone understood the question the same way. Many took it to mean 'should we increase door charges', to which most said no ('Increased charges would result in decreased demand', 'Thought it a bit high with the discontinued early-bird discount this year'), though one thought 'we could pay more'.

Others took the question to be about the differential between members and non-members. One respondent felt 'quite strongly that members should see a benefit for paying subs, so there needs to be a difference'. A couple of others pointed out that the discount is 'only 20%, not 30% as advertised'. Another commented: 'There needs to be a greater benefit to be gained from being a member; at present a member pays the same for 10 concerts plus sub as a non-member does for 10 concerts at full price and no sub. Non-members can get the e-newsletter, read the Balladeer on line, or join in any event ... Being able to vote at the AGM is the only privilege of membership — not very enticing.'

On a practical note, one respondent advised that we needed more change on the door, and another that we 'need to have someone on the door as not everyone pays'.

### **Now that we know...**

The questionnaire has been useful in providing the committee with a snapshot of members' views in 2009. This summary may also serve to remind us all that while our own views seem so obviously right, others can feel the same way about their own quite different views!

Even so, we have been sufficiently encouraged by the questionnaire responses to decide on some changes already.

- We will abandon the Friday experiment and focus on Sundays, with a different type of club event for each Sunday in the month
- From next year, events will start at 7.30 instead of 8pm
- The 'Open mic' night will become instead the 'Open stage' night, so that performers don't expect a microphone
- We will encourage members to join the search for a better regular venue, using a checklist of essential features (which you can pick up at the next club event).

Even if you didn't return your questionnaire you can still express your views directly to committee members or in an email to us. Getting the club you want is an ongoing process.